

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 3875

KUALA LUMPUR PASS HABIB

E.O. XGDS-4

TAGS: PINT, KS

SUBJECT: STATE OF OPPOSITION IN ROK

REF: (A) SEOUL 3631 (B) SEOUL 3630 (C) SEOUL 3737 (D) SEOUL 3816

SUMMARY: PREVAILING CONCERN AND UNCERTAINTY OVER NATIONAL SECURITY IS ASSISTING ROKG, IN SHORT RUN AT LEAST, IN EFFECTIVELY BLOCKING MOST ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY THROUGH EMERGENCY MEASURE NINE AND OTHER RESTRICTIVE ACTIONS. CHURCH AND PRESS HAVE LARGELY BEEN SILENCED. HOWEVER, STUDENT PROTEST REMAINS POTENTIAL PROBLEM FOR ROKG. OPPOSITION NDP HAS BEEN MANEUVERED INTO COOPERATION WITH ADMINISTRATION, WHILE REPORTS ARE SURFACING OF PRESIDENTIAL PROMISE TO KIM YONG-SAM FOR EVENTUAL DOMESTIC CONCESSIONS IN RETURN FOR THIS COOPERATION. IN LONG RUN OPPOSITION CONTENDS IT PLANS TO RESUME DRIVE TO AMEND CONSTITUTION WHEN CONDITIONS PERMIT. IN MEANTIME ROKG MAY BE MOVING TO PERPETUATE PRESENT STATE OF TIGHT GOVERNMENT CONTROL AND OPPOSITION WEAKNESS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE GOVERNMENT HAS SKILLFULLY CAPITALIZED ON NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUE IN EFFORTS TO ELICIT OPPOSITION COOPERATION AND SUPPRESS
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ANTI-GOVT CRITICISM. VARIOUS DISSENTING GROUPS ARE RELUCTANT TO

OPENLY OPPOSE CALL FOR NATIONAL UNITY; AT PRESENT THEY ARE BIDDING THEIR TIME.

2. CHRISTIAN ACTIVITIES HAVE FOR MOST PART BOWED TO GOVERNMENT PRESSURES, WHILE UNDER EMERGENCY MEASURE NINE ISOLATED PROTEST ACTIVITY GOES UNREPORTED. HARSH ROKG ACTIONS, SUCH AS EARLIER ARREST OF NCC SECRETARY GENERAL KIM KWAN-SOK AND ASSOCIATES FOR MISUSE CHURCH FUNDS HAS DRAWN LITTLE ACTIVE PROTEST FROM CHURCHES. LIKEWISE THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE PUBLIC REACTION AGAINST GOVERNMENT INSPIRED FIRING BY BUSINESS FIRMS OF CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ACTION GROUP MEMBERS. ASIDE FROM SEVERAL OBLIQUE REFERENCES TO SENSITIVE INCIDENTS, MEDIA HAVE ALSO BEEN DOCILE IN STRICTLY FOLLOWING GUIDELINES OF EMERGENCY MEASURE.

3. IN NEAR TERM THE CAMPUS IS THE MOST LIKELY FOCUS FOR RENEWED POLITICAL PROTEST. ALTHOUGH CONSTRAINTS OF EMERGENCY MEASURE NINE AND ROKG EFFORTS TO BRING STUDENTS INTO NATIONAL SECURITY CONSENSUS HAVE HAD SOME EFFECT, AT LEAST IN DRIVING MOST DISSENT UNDERGROUND, MAY 22 SNU DEMONSTRATION IN MEMORY OF STUDENT KIM SANG-CHIN'S SUICIDE ILLUSTRATES THAT BASIS FEELING OF STUDENT DISSIDENTS UNCHANGED; AND THAT THESE FEELINGS CAN ERUPT AND SPREAD INTO ANTI-GOVT ACTION.

4. FOR ITS PART THE ROKG HAS ACTED SWIFTLY TO PUNISH CAMPUS DEMONSTRATORS WHILE AT THE SAME TIME HOLDING IN RESERVE MAXIMUM STEP OF INDICTMENT UNDER EMERGENCY MEASURE NINE. ACTIONS SUCH AS REPLACEMENT SNU PRESIDENT HAN SIM-SOK AND NATIONAL POLICE DIRECTOR PAK NYON-UK ARE WARNINGS TO ESTABLISHMENT FIGURES RESPONSIBLE FOR CAMPUS SECURITY TO KEEP BETTER CONTROL OF STUDENTS. NEW SNU PRESIDENT YUN CHON-CHU HAS CALLED ON STUDENTS AND FACULTY TO AVOID TURMOIL ON CAMPUS AND WARNED OF PUNISHMENT FOR DEMONSTRATORS. ROK ACTIONS CLEARLY DEMONSTRATE CONTINUED CONCERN WITH UNPREDICTABLE CAMPUS SITUATION. NEVERTHELESS, MAJORITY OF EMBASSY POLITICAL CONTACTS FEEL THAT THIS SWIFT GOVERNMENT REACTION AND GENERAL CONCERN WITH SECURITY SITUATION, WHICH IS SHARED BY MANY STUDENTS, CREATES SITUATION NOT CONDUCIVE TO MAJOR STUDENT PROTEST, AND UNTIL THIS CLIMATE CHANGES STUDENT PROTEST WILL BE ISOLATED AND MOST LIKELY START WITH PERIPHERAL ISSUES RATHER THAN DIRECT ATTACK ON YUSHIN SYSTEM.

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5. OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE VIRTUALLY CEASED PUBLIC CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT SYSTEM AND ACTIVITIES. THE NDP IS NOW ENGAGED IN BIPARTISAN EFFORT FOR NATIONAL SECURITY SYMBOLIZED BY MAY 20 JOINT NATIONAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION AND MAY 21 MEETING BETWEEN NDP LEADER KIM YONG-SAM AND PRESIDENT PAK. RANKING NDP LEADERS HAVE TOLD US CHIEF CONSIDERATION IN PARTY RESTRAINT IS NECESSITY TO PROJECT IMAGE CONSENSUS ON NATIONAL SECURITY BOTH TO NORTH KOREA AND TO U.S. CONGRESS. HOWEVER, THEY NOTE THAT EMERGENCY

MEASURE NINE. WHICH NOT ONLY LIMITS THEIR ACTIVITIES BUT PREVENTS REPORTING OF ANTI-GOVT CRITICISM, AS PRACTICAL MATTER MAKES POLITICAL DISSENT INEFFECTIVE.

6. OPPOSITION FIGURES DIFFER ON ESTIMATE OF DURATION THIS POLICY OF MODERATION. ECHOING WORDS DRP POLICY CHAIRMAN, NDP DEPUTY FLOOR LEADER OM YONG-TAL TOLD EMBOFF THAT PRESENT SITUATION COULD LAST MORE THAN ONE YEAR; OTHER NDP LEADERS, SUCH AS PARTY SPOKESMAN YI TAEK-TON, HAVE TOLD US THAT ANTI-YUSHIN ACTIVITY MAY RESUME IN SEVERAL MONTHS IF NORTHERN THREAT FAILS TO MATERIALIZE AND GOVERNMENT CONTINUES HARD LINE DOMESTIC POLICY. ALL OUR OPPOSITION ASSEMBLY CONTACTS HAVE TOLD US BASIC PARTY OBJECTIVE TO AMEND CONSTITUTION REMAINS UNCHANGED, BUT THEY SEEM DEMORALIZED AND RESIGNED TO INDETERMINATE PERIOD OF WAITING UNDER EMERGENCY MEASURE BEFORE RESUMING ACTIVITY.

7. PRESS HAS REPORTED SOME INTERNAL DISAGREEMENT OVER APPARENT BASIC NDP POLICY CHANGE. WITH EXCEPTION SOME KIM TAE-CHUNG FOLLOWERS, THE MOST VOCAL CRITICS OF POLICY ARE NORMALLY CONSERVATIVE PRO-GOVERNMENT OPPONENTS OF KIM YONG-SAM SUCH AS YI CHOL-SUNG AND CHONG HAE-YONG. THIS INDICATES CRITICISM IS BASICALLY PERSONAL ATTACK AGAINST KIM YONG-SAM.

8. NDP POLITICAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL CHAIRMAN YI CHUNG-CHAE HAS TOLD US THAT MAJORITY OF PARTY MEMBERS AND PUBLIC ARE RESERVING JUDGMENT ON KIM YONG-SAM'S POLICY AND LEADERSHIP UNDER ASSUMPTION THAT KIM RECEIVED SPECIFIC COMMITMENT FOR DOMESTIC CONCESSION FROM PRESIDENT IN RETURN FOR CESSATION PARTY CRITICISM. YI SAID THAT IF CLEAR CONCESSION FAILS TO MATERIALIZE IN NEXT FEW MONTHS KIM WILL BE SUBJECT TO SEVERE CRITICISM AND POSITION AS PARTY LEADER POSSIBLY THREATENED.

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9. WHILE THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENT ON CONTENT OF KIM/PAK MEETING, INDICATIONS OF DEAL OF SORTS ARE BEGINNING TO SURFACE. PRESS SOURCE REPORTS THAT KIM YONG-SAM TOLD HIM, OFF THE RECORD, THAT PRESIDENT PROMISED TO STEP DOWN AT "APPROPRIATE TIME." YI CHUNG-CHAE CONFIRMS THIS BUT NOTES PROMISE SO VAGUE AS TO BE MEANINGLESS, AND THAT IN SPITE OF ANY PROMISE, PRESIDENT UNLIKELY TO RELINQUISH POWER UNLESS FORCED. HOWEVER, YI SAID KIM DID INDICATE HE WAS PROMISED SOME SPECIFIC CONCESSION FROM PAK; YI BELIEVES THIS POSSIBLE SINCE PRESIDENT MAY DECIDE TO BOLSTER IMAGE OF NOW COOPERATIVE KIM YONG-SAM RATHER THAN GIVE KIM TAE-CHUNG OPPORTUNITY TO BID FOR NDP LEADERSHIP.

10. SEVERAL OPPOSITION LEADERS HAVE TOLD US THEY CONSIDER NEXT FEW MONTHS CRITICAL FOR NDP AND FUTURE OPPOSITION POLITICS IN ROK. DESPITE ANY DEAL WITH KIM YONG-SAM THEY BELIEVE PRESIDENT PAK MAY BE

TEMPTED TO KEEP TIGHT LID ON EVEN AFTER SITUATION STABILIZES.

11. OTHER OPPOSITION FIGURES AND GROUPS ALSO ARE WAITING FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS. NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR RESTORATION DEMOCRACY (NCRD) HAS VIRTUALLY CEASED PUBLIC OPERATIONS. KIM TAE-CHUNG, WITH ONGOING TRIAL HANGING OVER HIS HEAD, HAS RECENTLY REITERATED DESIRE TO GO ABROAD. IN MEANTIME HE HAS BEEN RESTRAINED IN CRITICISM OF KIM YONG-SAM'S LEADERSHIP, ALTHOUGH FOREIGN PRESS REPORTS INDICATE THAT HE IS TAKING SLIGHTLY MORE CRITICAL LINE AGAINST ROKG THAN IS KIM YONG-SAM. SEVERAL OPPOSITION ASSEMBLYMEN CONSIDER KIM TAE-CHUNG READY TO MAKE BID FOR OPPOSITION LEADERSHIP IF KIM YONG-SAM BECOMES TOO CLOSELY IDENTIFIED WITH THE GOVERNMENT.

12. LOCAL POLITICAL OBSERVERS GENERALLY VIEW LULL IN OPPOSITION ACTIVITY AS TEMPORARY PRODUCT OF INTERNATIONAL UNCERTAINTY. ROKG, HOWEVER, IS PRESENTING NEW INCREASED THREAT FROM NORTH AS SEMI-PERMANENT CRISIS CONDITION. GOVERNMENT STATEMENTS INDICATE EMERGENCY MEASURE NINE MAY LAST SEVERAL YEARS, AND OPPOSITION FEARS LAW TO CONTROL FORMER COMMUNISTS, WHICH IS PROPOSED FOR JUNE SPECIAL ASSEMBLY SESSION, MAY BE DRAFTED SO AS TO APPLY TO WIDE RANGE OF ANTI-GOVERNMENT FIGURES. IN THIS ENVIRONMENT GOVERNMENT'S CRITICS MAY FIND IT DIFFICULT TO SWITCH BACK TO AN ACTIVE OPPOSITION ROLE EVEN IF THEY FEEL SECURITY SITUATION ALLOWS RESUMPTION OF PUBLIC DISSENT.

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